Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Original) A network backplane interface for a local network, comprising:

(a) a circuit board;

(b) a plurality of sockets connected to the circuit board for receiving plug-in network devices;

(c) power lines on the circuit board to one or more sockets for powering a plug-in network device in each socket;

(d) communication lines on the circuit board to each socket for communication with the plug-in network devices; and

(e) a housing for the circuit board, power lines and communication lines, including openings for exposing said sockets.

2. (Original) The backplane of claim 1, further comprising a communication controller which allows communication between the plug-in devices.

3. (previously presented) The backplane of claim 1, further comprising a configuration circuit on the circuit board which allows configuring function of one or more plug-in devices to perform desired functions.

4. (previously presented) The backplane of claim 3, wherein the configuration circuit communicates with a plug-in device in a socket to identify the plug-in device and configure the plug-in device for network communication function.

5. (Original) The backplane of claim 3, wherein the configuration circuit comprises:

(1) memory for storing configuration instructions for configuring one or more different

plug-in devices, and

(2) processor for executing the configuration instructions to communicate with a plug-in device in a socket, and configure that device for network communication.

6. (Original) The backplane of claim 3, wherein the configuration circuit includes a configuration memory having configuration information for a plurality of predetermined plug-in device types.

7. (Original) The backplane of claim 6, wherein the configuration circuit includes extended configuration memory for storing configuration information for additional device types.

8. (Original) The backplane of claim 3, wherein the configuration circuit includes an embedded configuration module to configure plug-in devices in a configuration session.

9. (Original) The backplane of claim 8, wherein the configuration module configures all plug-in devices in one configuration session.

10. (Original) The backplane of claim 9, wherein the configuration module comprises a platform-independent configuration software.

11. (previously presented) The backplane of claim 9, wherein the configuration circuit provides a user interface for receiving user configuration commands to configure function of one or more plug-in devices to perform a desired function.

12. (Original) The backplane of claim 1, wherein at least one socket is dedicated to connection and communication with an external network.

13. (Original) The backplane of claim 12, further including a switch for connecting a

security module between said socket for external connection, and the local network.

14. (Original) The backplane of claim 13, further including a connection for bridging a security module between said socket for external connection, and the local network.

15. (Original) The backplane of claim 1, wherein a socket comprises a RJ-45 socket.

16. (Original) The backplane of claim 1, wherein a socket comprises a proprietary connector combining power and data connections.

17. (previously presented) A network backplane interface for a local network, comprising:

(a) a plurality of sockets for receiving plug-in network devices;

(b) power lines to one or more sockets for powering a plug-in network device in each socket;

(c) communication lines to each socket for communication with the plug-in network devices; and

(d) a configuration module for functional configuration of one or more plug-in devices, wherein the configuration module communicates with each plug-in device in each socket to identify the plug-in device and configure function of the plug-in device to perform desired functions.

18. (Original) The backplane of claim 17, wherein the configuration module comprises:

(1) memory for storing configuration instructions for configuring one or more different plug-in devices, and

(2) processor for executing the configuration instructions to communicate with a plug-in device in a socket, and configure that device for network communication.

19. (Original) The backplane of claim 17, wherein the configuration module includes a configuration memory having configuration information for a plurality of predetermined plug-in device types.

20. (Original) The backplane of claim 19, wherein the configuration module includes extended configuration memory for storing configuration information for additional device types.

21. (previously presented) The backplane of claim 17, wherein the configuration module allows configuring plug-in devices in a configuration session for network communication among the plug-in devices.

22. (Original) The backplane of claim 21, wherein the configuration module configures all plug-in devices in one configuration session.

23. (Original) The backplane of claim 22, wherein the configuration module comprises a platform-independent configuration software.

24. (previously presented) The backplane of claim 22, wherein the configuration module provides a user interface for receiving user configuration commands to configure function of one or more plug-in devices to perform a desired function.

25. (previously presented) A network interface module for a local network, comprising:

(a) a plurality of sockets for receiving plug-in network devices;

(b) power lines to one or more sockets for powering a plug-in network device in each socket;

(c) a switch connected to each socket allowing communication with the plug-in network devices; and

(d) a configuration module for functional configuration of one or more plug-in devices, wherein the configuration module communicates with each plug-in device in each socket to identify the plug-in device and configure the plug-in device to perform selected functions.

26. (Original) The network interface module of claim 25, wherein the configuration module comprises:

(1) memory for storing configuration instructions for configuring one or more different plug-in devices, and

(2) processor for executing the configuration instructions to communicate with a plug-in device in a socket, and configure that device for network communication.

27. (Original) The network interface module of claim 25, wherein the configuration module includes a configuration memory having configuration information for a plurality of predetermined plug-in device types.

28. (Original) The network interface module of claim 27, wherein the configuration module includes extended configuration memory for storing configuration information for additional device types.

29. (previously presented) The network interface module of claim 25, wherein the configuration module allows configuring plug-in devices in a configuration session for network communication among the plug-in devices.

30. (Original) The network interface module of claim 29, wherein the configuration module configures all plug-in devices in one configuration session.

31. (Original) The network interface module of claim 30, wherein the configuration module comprises a platform-independent configuration software.

32. (previously presented) The network interface module of claim 30, wherein the configuration module provides a user interface for receiving user configuration commands to configure function of one or more plug-in devices to perform a desired function.

33. (Original) The network interface module of claim 25 further comprising a backplane for the sockets, power lines, switch and configuration module.

34. (Original) The network interface module of claim 33 wherein the backplane comprises a printed circuit board.

35. (previously presented) The backplane of claim 8, wherein the configuration module provides a common user interface for receiving user configuration commands to configure each plug-in device from the common user interface.

36. (previously presented) The backplane of claim 35 wherein the common user interface further receives user configuration commands to configure the backplane.

37. (previously presented) The backplane of claim 36 wherein the common user interface is platform and operating system independent, and utilizes a common communication protocol between the plug-ins and the configuration module.

38. (previously presented) The backplane of claim 36 wherein the common user interface comprises a graphical user interface.

39. (currently amended) The backplane of claim 36 wherein the configuration circuit <u>is centralized to the backplane and</u> is accessible via a web browser to configure the plug-in devices.

40. (previously presented) The backplane of claim 4 wherein the configuration circuit further includes embedded configuration instructions for configuring one or more different plug-in devices, such that the configuration circuit uses identity of each plug-in device to obtain corresponding configuration instructions for configuring the different plug-in devices.

41. (previously presented) The backplane of claim 4 wherein if a plug-in device is not recognized by the configuration circuit, then the configuration circuit obtains configuration instructions for the unrecognized device from a source external to the configuration circuit.

42. (previously presented) The backplane of claim 41 wherein if a plug-in device is not recognized by the configuration circuit, then the configuration circuit obtains configuration instructions for the unrecognized device from a user.

43. (previously presented) The backplane of claim 41 wherein if a plug-in device is not recognized by the configuration circuit, then the configuration circuit obtains configuration instructions for the unrecognized device from the unrecognized device itself.